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REVIEWS OF BOOKS

The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria. By MORRIS JASTROW, JR., Ph.D., Professor of Semitic Languages in the University of Pennsylvania. (Boston : Ginn and Co. 1898. Pp. xii, 780.)

THE publication of a series of handbooks on the history of religions is one of the many proofs of the growing interest in this study. The series of which the present volume is one is intended especially for use in college and university classes. The first of these handbooks to appear was that by Professor Hopkins, of Yale, on the *Religions of India*. The present work is the second volume, and the author, Professor Jastrow, is also the general editor of the series.

The task of writing at the present time a handbook of the religion of Babylonia and Assyria was one of peculiar difficulty, because the study of Assyriology, as the deciphering and interpretation of the cuneiform texts is called, is a comparatively recent thing, and the changes in our knowledge, or sometimes our supposed knowledge, of Assyria and Babylonia have been frequent and often startling, owing to the continuous discovery of new material. At the present moment at least two important expeditions are at work in Babylonia, and the discoveries which they will make may fairly be expected to add very largely to our present stock of knowledge, if not to change materially many of the views now held. In addition to this, there is, in the museums of Europe and of this country, an immense amount of inscribed material from Babylonia which has not yet been thoroughly worked over. Furthermore, it must be said that Assyriologists have shown a marked inclination to present astonishing theories, and, so to speak, to claim everything in sight, which often renders it difficult to use satisfactorily the material actually published.

It was with considerable curiosity that we opened this book, wondering how, in view of the tentative condition of our knowledge in many matters, the author would deal with his subject ; and we laid it down with the conviction that Professor Jastrow had guided his bark with remarkable skill through the narrow and dangerous passage between the Scylla of wild speculation on the one hand, and the Charybdis of knownothingism and uncertainty on the other. He appears to have shown sound judgment in picking out what is really known, and so arranging and co-ordinating that material as to present an intelligible and coherent picture of the religion of Babylonia and Assyria. The matter is not presented with any particular charm of style—rather the contrary—nor with that plausibility which sometimes carries one away contrary to one's better judgment ; but there is an effect of sober good sense and sound learning,

which makes the reader feel that what is here set down may be accepted, and that it is not a mere spinning of hypotheses to be torn to pieces by the next newest discovery. Rather, we seem to have the framework of a good, solid building, which future discoveries will only wall in where walls are still lacking, and furnish where it is still unfurnished. The author is quite frank in pointing out what is not known or uncertain, and this very frankness helps to make the reader rely upon his statements where he does claim to know. There is nowhere in the book that cocksure attitude which Assyriologists seem somewhat prone to assume.

After an introductory chapter on "Sources and Methods of Study," and a second on "The Land and the People," Professor Jastrow introduces us to the old Babylonian Pantheon. Starting "with that phase of religious beliefs known as Animism, which has been ascertained to be practically universal in primitive society," and pointing out that the "Babylonian religion in the oldest form known to us may be best described as a mixture of local and nature cults" (p. 48), he then takes up, one by one, the names of gods found in the oldest inscriptions, from Tello and Nippur, and traces through some two hundred pages the development and modification of this Pantheon. We have first the gods prior to the days of Hammurabi; then we have the Pantheon as reconstituted when Babylon became the leading city of the country under Hammurabi; next, the Pantheon as it showed itself in the period of Assyrian supremacy; and finally the Pantheon in the neo-Babylonian period, under Nebuchadnezzar and his successors. At first, it must be confessed, this seems to be tedious and unprofitable reading (and we are still inclined to believe that it might be compressed with advantage). There is a chaos of vague and repetitious gods, all singularly alike, except for the differences of their unpronounceable names. But little by little, if the reader persists, he will begin to realize that there is a development in the conceptions of these gods. The chaos of fragments of half-known gods begins to show signs of intelligible arrangement; you find evidences of reflection; theological ideas begin to make themselves felt; and before long you are experiencing something of the joy of the excavator in an ancient Babylonian mound, when he realizes stratification in the material which had at first seemed to him absolutely chaotic. Gradually what was at first so tedious becomes actually fascinating, as you see how political influences affect the conceptions and relations of the gods, how the predominance of the city of Babylon and the establishment there of a great empire, controlling all the small states, brings about this simplification of the Pantheon and its re-arrangement around Marduk, the great god of the capital city. Professor Jastrow sums this up in the concluding chapter of the book where he says (p. 691): "The centralization of political power and of religious supremacy is concomitant with the focussing of intellectual life in Babylon. The priests of Marduk set the fashion in theological thought. So far as possible, the ancient traditions and myths were reshaped so as to contribute to the glory of Marduk. The chief part in the work of creation is assigned to him. The storm-god En-lil is set aside to make room for the solar diety Marduk."

After the chapters which discuss the nature and functions of the gods of Babylon and Assyria in the different periods, follow chapters on "The Religious Literature of Babylonia," "The Magical Texts" (one of the most interesting chapters in the entire book), "The Prayers and Hymns," "Penitential Psalms," and "Oracles and Omens." These chapters deal with the development of ritual and its application to the needs of life. How is man to be protected against the evil influences and the evil spirits which surround him? How is he to be saved from sin and its consequences? What is sin and how is he to know the will of the gods, to disobey which is sin? How is he to be guided in the way of righteousness and prosperity, and how shall he be warned against the calamity which lurks in his path? It is the object of religion to care for these things, and these chapters show the way in which Babylonian priests and theologians conceived that this should be done. We have here a development from the times of unreflecting folk-religion on to the stage of theological thought and reflection. These texts show us something of the same sort of development which we find in the law-books of the Hebrew scriptures. They were finally shaped by the priests in the temples, but they contain much that originated in the period of folk-religion. It is interesting to observe that Professor Jastrow fixes the time of the formulation of the ritual, in the shape in which it has practically come down to us, in the period of Hammurabi and his immediate successors (about 2200 to 2000 B. C.). They reshaped and adapted it to the theological views of their time, and to the new religion, if one may so call it, of Marduk. The changes which took place after that are of minor importance.

Next follow chapters on "The Cosmology of the Babylonians" and the closely connected subject of astrology. "The Gilgamesh Epic" is treated in considerable detail, and is followed by a chapter on "Myths and Legends." Then comes an important and interesting discussion of "The Views of Life after Death," and then, at still greater length, a description of "The Temples and the Cult." This last chapter seems to us less satisfactory than those which precede it, presumably because, in spite of recent excavations, we are not yet in a position to reconstruct the Babylonian temples with any degree of detail, and our knowledge of the cult is extremely vague.

It is noticeable that Professor Jastrow is not carried away with that excess of enthusiasm which often leads a writer to become a partisan of his theme. In the concluding chapter, which gives a general estimate of the religion, he says (p. 696): "From the standpoint of religious doctrine, accordingly, the religion of Babylonia and Assyria does not occupy a unique position. In this respect, the Egyptian religion reaches a higher level." And on the same page, speaking of the tendency toward monotheism in the religions of the Babylonians and Assyrians, on which undue stress is often laid, he says: "No decided steps in this direction were ever taken. Both in the south and in the north, this tendency is but the expression of the pre-eminent rank accorded to Marduk

and Ashur, respectively. The independent existence of two heads in the combined pantheon was sufficient to prevent the infusion of an ethical spirit into this monotheistic tendency ; and unless a monotheistic conception of the universe is interpreted in an ethical sense, monotheism (or monolatry) has no great superiority, either religiously or philosophically, over polytheism." In the same chapter he points out the influence of Babylonian religion upon both Judaism and Christianity. In regard to the former he maintains that while the "stimulus to religious advance came to the Hebrews from the ancient centres of thought and worship in the Euphrates valley," on the other hand "degrading tendencies, too, found an entrance into post-exilic Judaism through Babylonian influence. Close contact of Jews with Babylonians served to make the former more accessible to the popular beliefs in incantations and the power of demons than they would otherwise have been." Christianity was directly affected by Babylonian influences, as well as indirectly, through Judaism, and the direct influences which came to Christianity from the Babylonian religion were all bad, inasmuch as they came from the period of its decay. Gnosticism Professor Jastrow regards as a survival of the religion of Babylonia under the mask of Christianity.

Professor Jastrow is conservative not only with regard to the very ancient dates now assigned to Babylonian antiquity, but also with regard to the influence of the Babylonian religion and culture upon China and Egypt, which are so positively asserted in some quarters. On the other hand, while thus wisely cautious, he does not fail to make clear the great debt which the world of thought owes to Babylonian culture, as well in the field of religion as in that of art and science.

As this is a handbook for study, the author has provided a very thorough bibliography of his subject, covering over thirty pages, and divided for greater convenience of use under some nine different subtitles. The index covers more than forty pages, but even then it is not complete, as we have found in our endeavor to look up certain things.

Space does not permit the criticism in detail of the passages which we had marked for that purpose. In a few places we noted curious little errors, which may possibly be due to faulty proof-reading, like the half-consistent substitution of "capitol" for "capital" in a number of chapters. But these are small matters. The book is a valuable contribution to the comparative study of religions.

JOHN P. PETERS.

Jewish Religious Life after the Exile. By the Rev. T. K. CHEYNE, M.A., D.D., Oriel Professor of the Interpretation of Holy Scripture at Oxford, Canon of Rochester. [American Lectures on the History of Religions, Third Series, 1897-1898.] (New York and London: G. P. Putnam's Sons. 1898. Pp. xxii, 270.)

THE literature of the Jews in the Persian and Greek periods has long been with Professor Cheyne a subject of special study, the fruits of which